Erin Weinstock

Ms. Kraft

AML 2410, Section 8974

September 23, 2013

In Our Time Response Paper

William Tecumseh Sherman, a union general during the civil war famously stated, “war is hell.” Though Earnest Hemingway’s novel *In Our Time* is set during the World War One era, the statement is still highly applicable. Hemingway illustrated in this novel the chaos and “hell” that describes war, and the effect war had on the people serving their country. World War One was an interesting time in world history for multiple reasons. One reason being, this was one of the first times in world history that the United States and Europe no longer lived in their bubble that was ignorant to war and destruction. These two areas had finally seen first hand how destructive war truly is. This was also an interesting war was because it was first time in world history that such a large group of young men had to experience the horrors of war, and mature very quickly as a result of the chaos they had to deal with. Hemingway tactfully illustrates and describes these ideas throughout the duration of the novel.

War is Chaotic. It’s also safe to assume that Hemingway would agree with that statement. Chaos is defined as, “complete disorder and confusion; behavior so unpredictable as to appear random” (Oxford Dictionary). Hemingway begins the book with a chapter just as random and chaotic as war itself. “On the Quai at Smyrna” is a chapter that is full of screaming, death, and the utter chaotic randomness of war. This chapter throws the reader directly into the horrors that afflicted these young soldiers from the beginning; “You couldn’t get the women to give up their dead babies. They’d have babies dead for six days. Wouldn’t give them up. Nothing you could do about it. Had to take them away finally” (Hemingway 1). This single quote showed the chaos of the chapter and the war. It also illustrates what these young men had to handle with the little bit of real life experience they had.

Hemingway definitely wasn’t afraid to illustrate the horrifying and grotesque scenes of death and terror that occurred during World War One. There are so many examples of the chaotic nature of war that describes that statement. Chapter two, though extremely short, describes the soldiers experience while watching an evacuation of people in Adrianople. It was a scene of elderly people attempting to carry their belongings, crying children, and upset parents. On top of all of that, it was happening in the rain. The soldier narrating this sight described his experience as, “scared sick looking at it” (Hemingway 21). That single quote describes and gives the reader the impression of the true disgust the solider feels while watching this chaotic scene unfold in front of him.

Additionally, Hemingway describes the randomness of death and the surprise soldiers feel after killing another human being. In chapter three, Hemingway creates a scene that describes german soldiers being shot and killed, but then the surprise the narrating solider feels after killing them, knowing fully well that it could have been the narrator himself in the same exact way. Thus describing the maturity a solider must acquire in order to achieve that conclusion in such a chaotic time.

Moreover, the young men who fought in the war, changed as a result of the chaos that overtook them. No chapter describes that stabetter then “Soldiers Home.” This chapter describes the effect of the war on a soldier named Krebs. It described how before the war, he was a fraternity brother who loved meeting girls and seemed fairly content with life. After the war though, his mannerisms changed significantly. He was no longer content, and was no longer appreciative of the relationships around him. He even went as far as telling his mother that he didn’t love her. The war changed him into a callused and cynical person. All he wanted was for life to be simple again, but the war had changed his outlook of the world, and made it seem more complex; “He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way.” This shows that the war had not only changed his outlook on life, but had also stolen his innocence of terror.

In conclusion, Hemingway’s novel *In Our Time* describes not only the chaos of war, but also the changes war inflicts on the young minds who have to fight in it. If anything this novel should teach us to be conscientious and sensitive around the topic of war, and around the people who fight in war. This book clearly illustrates that it’s a hell that no one would ever want to experience, but if they do have the displeasure of having to engage in such chaos, its important to see how the world could possibly look from their point of view as a result.